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COUNTRY SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

By HAMILTON W. MABIE

Illustrated from original photographs by Conrad Baer.

AT the end of February the observer begins to see the faint forerunners of spring. The willow shows signs of renewing its freshness, and the long stretch of cold, with brilliant or steely skies, is interrupted by days full of an indescribable softness. It is almost pathetic to note with what joy the spirit of man takes cognizance of these first hints of the color, the bloom and the warmth slowly creeping up to the southern horizon-line. For we are children of the sun, and, much as we love our hearthstones, we are never quite at home unless we have the freedom of the out-of-door world. Winter finds its great charm in the ingathering of the memories of the summer that is gone and in the anticipation of the summer that is at hand. Half the cheer of the blazing log lies in the air of the woods which it brings into the narrow room.

To be out of doors is the normal condition of the natural man. At some period of our ancestral life, so dim in our thought but so potential in our temper, disposition and physique, we have all lived, so to speak, in the open air; and although city-born and city-bred, we turn to the country with an instinctive feeling that we belong there. There are a few cockneys to whom the sound of Bow Bells is



ON THE FARM IN CANADA

sweeter than the note of the bluebird, the resonant clarion of chanticleer or the far-off bleating of sheep; but to the immense majority of men these noises are like sounds that were familiar in childhood. I have sometimes thought that the deepest charm of the country lies in the fact that it was the home and play-ground of the childhood of the race, and, however long some of us have been departed from it, it stirs within us rare memories and associations which are imperishable. The lowing of cattle coming home at night-fall; the bleating of sheep on the hillside pastures; the crowing of the cock, are older than any human speech which now exists. They were ancient sounds before our oldest histories were written. I know of nothing sweeter to the man who comes out of the heat and noise and dust of the city in midsummer than to be awakened on the first morning by that irregular tinkle of bells which accompanies the early processions of the cows. One may never have come nearer a farm than his great-grandfather, but that sound makes him feel as if he were at home after some long and arduous absence.

And one has but to put into his pocket a few of those clever newspapers which satirize society people in spirited and well-drawn lines, and carry them into the country, to discover that the picturesque flees the city and loves the country; so far, that is, as people are concerned. There is certainly something wrong with



THE OLD WELL-CURB



IMMIGRANT WOMEN HOEING POTATOES

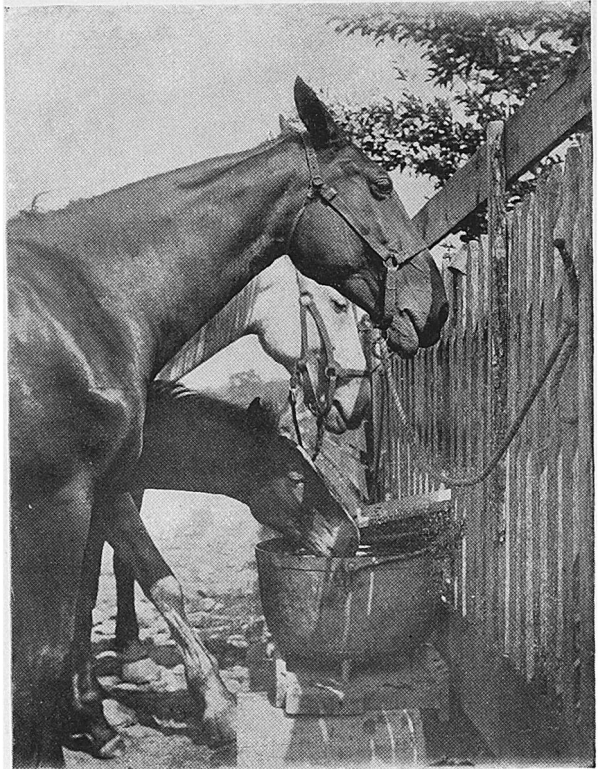


WAITING FOR MILKING-TIME

our modern dress; it is impossible to discover anything suggestive or poetic in it, or to make any thing artistic out of it. Well-dressed individual men and women are often attractive to the eye; but when this is true it is because the charm of the person survives the monotonous uniformity of good clothes. Nothing can make the evening dress in which man extinguishes his personality either significant or artistic; but the man in overalls and shirt-sleeves is

often a strikingly picturesque figure. Country life as a whole is steeped in the picturesque, in spite of the machines which so largely take the place of the old-time hand labor. One must go to the fields to find the poetry of human occupation; the man in the street is often interesting but he rarely stirs the imagination; the man in the fields constantly sets the imagination loose. What elemental strength and meaning are expressed in those peasant-figures of Millet? They belong to the world in which they toil: they disclose their identity with it; they express something of its meaning in their vigorous or bent forms.

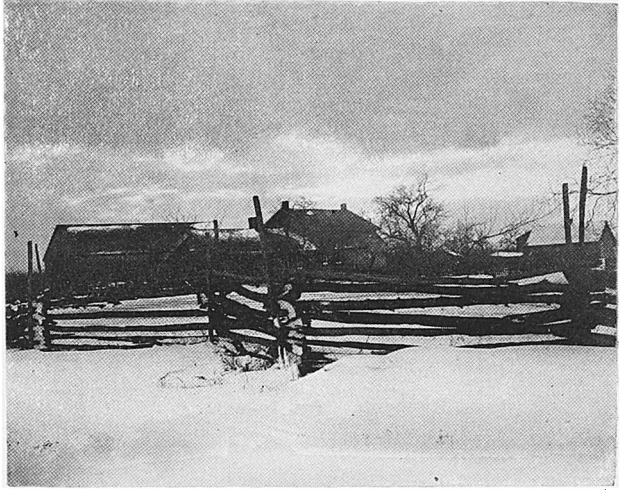
The entire life of the field is poetic in the true sense; from the hour when the last snow begins to melt to the hour when the last sheaf of grain goes creaking through the bars. The sower, moving across the open furrows, has a kind of antique picturesqueness; he seems to have stepped out of that ancient frieze with which the earliest habits encircled the oldest days. He expresses freedom, virility, personality in every movement; the eye follows him with a deepening impression that here is something native and original: a man in first-hand relations with his world. The reaper who follows him



AFTER WORK

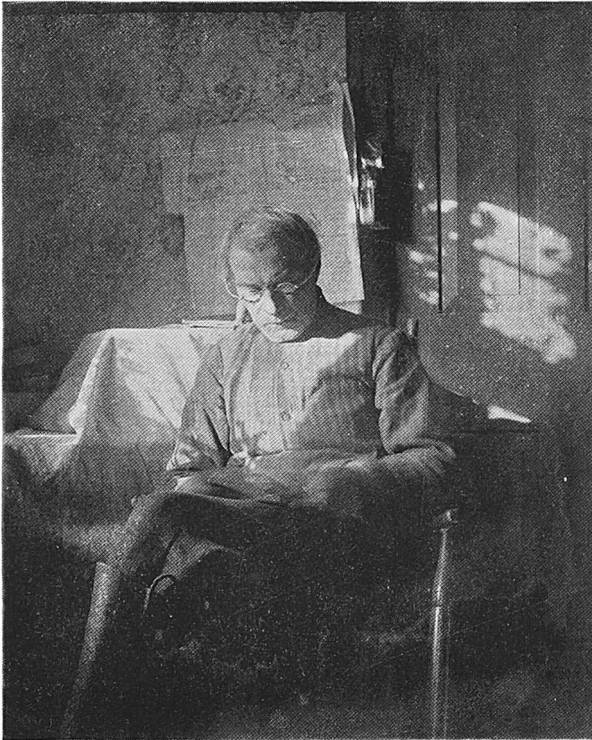
when sun and cloud have done their share, is not less striking and effective; and when the sheaves lie in rows or piles on the freshly cut stubble, the slow-moving, noisily creaking wagon, constantly pausing to take on its ripe load, seems a fit accessory in the staging of this pastoral drama. The fact that this poetry of motion is bound to toil so arduous and exacting that it often becomes a kind of relentless drudgery, is full of significance to those who believe that beauty is not esoteric, but the affluence of universal life in its normal relations and occupations.

The sights and sounds of the farm are not only full of interest, but that interest is deepened by their constant recurrence. The horses at the trough; the sheep beside the stream as placid as themselves, or on the green uplands; the cows stolidly biding the coming of afternoon under the trees, or standing knee-deep in



A WINTER EVENING ON THE FARM

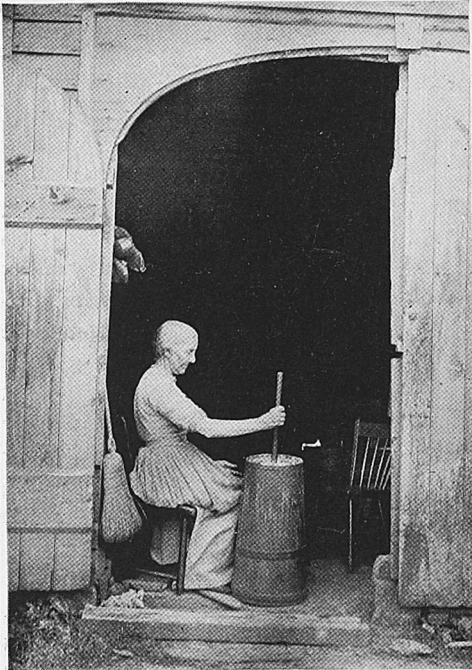
the cool brooks; the clucking of hens and their bustling leisure; the going out of the workers, with implements, seed, machines, wagons, and their return at sunset; the stir of the morning, the hush of the evening; what a world of homely, wholesome life is revealed in these old-time doings and happenings of the seasons and the life on the farm.



SUNDAY AFTERNOON

But the farm is often only a unit of measurement, a term of individual possession; there is something greater; there is the country. Beyond the fields there is the landscape, and above them there is the sky; and every farm fits into these wider relations and is part of the larger whole. The woods, cool and silent; the spring hidden from the sun by overhanging trees and from strange feet

by moss-grown rocks; the brook where it runs noiselessly in a shadow so deep at noon that one bathes his eyes in it after the glare of the world; the old mill, deserted by man but loyally served by the stream that flows through the decaying sluice and over the wheel that turns no more; the quiet hilltop, above which the whole country sleeps on summer afternoons;—these are all simply extensions of the farm. The boys know them on holidays; the older people are drawn to



CHURNING IN THE BARN

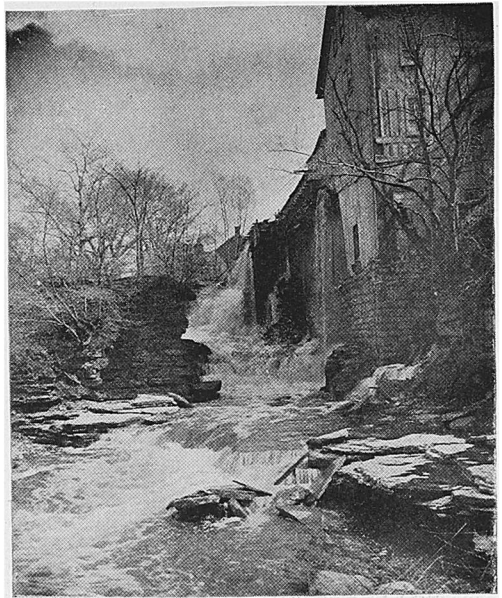
for they are, one and all, places of silence and solitude.

The fever of this our life, and the tumult of it, vanish on the invisible boundaries of these ancient sanctuaries of nature. It is not difficult to understand the charm of these places for tired and worn souls; for it is to such places that exhausted men and women invariably turn. No one with a rich intellectual and spiritual nature, can keep in perfect health without a good deal of



A SUNNY PLAY-GROUND

them in those infrequent hours when the pressure of work is lightened; the man who is getting city sights and sounds out of head and heart knows and loves them. The very thought of them brings refreshment and repose:



THE OLD MILL

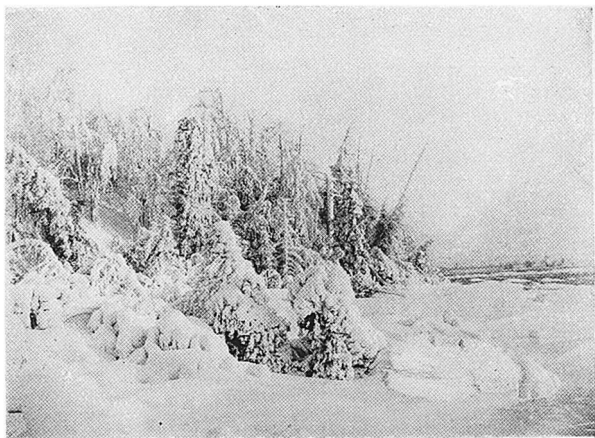
solitude and silence. We come to know ourselves and the world in the deeper ways only when we are apart from the rush of things. It is only when traffic ceases and the dust is laid that the landscape becomes clear and complete to the pedestrian. The quiet of the woods, the cool note of the mountain streams, the silence of the summits, represent, not the luxuries and pleasures of a rich life, but its necessities. To the townsman these outlying provinces of the farm are even more important than are the well-tilled acres.

Some day some man or woman will write a luminous book on the education of country life; the training of the eye, the ear, the hand, the unconscious enrichment of the senses and of the mind which are effected by its sights and sounds. There has never been in the long history of education, a better school for the open-minded, imaginative boy or girl than the farm. Every day sets its tasks, every task teaches its lessons; and nature stands looking over the student's shoulder and quietly

whispering some of her deepest secrets to her fortunate child.

For surely it is a great piece of good fortune to grow up in a wise, generous home in the country; to be young with all-manner of four-footed beasts and fowls of the air, and grow up with them; to stumble over the roots of trees when one is beginning to walk; to hear the brooks chatter before one knows how to chatter himself; to awake in the stir of the morning, when the whole world seems to be going to work, and to fall asleep when the world comes trooping home, dusty and tired.

To see and hear these outdoor sights and sounds is to be born into vital relations with man's natural background and to come unconsciously into possession of



AFTER A WET SNOW STORM



MAPLE-SUGAR TIME



THE BLACK SHEEP

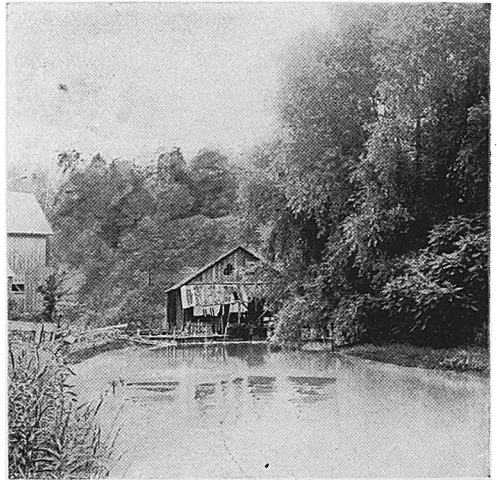
quaintance of nature in childhood than in those later years which bring "the philosophic mind," but which leave the senses untrained for that instinctive observation which enables the boy to see without knowing that he sees.

John Burroughs has given us a charming description of the joys of boyhood on a farm, and has perhaps unconsciously betrayed the secret of his own extraordinary familiarity with the out-of-doors world. No knowledge is quite so much a part of ourselves as that which we gain without conscious effort; which we breathe in with the morning air of life.

The Hindoos have an idiomatic

some of the greatest truths which life has to teach. It is also to be born on intimate terms with blue-birds and cherries!

"If you want to know where the biggest cherries are to be found," said Goethe, "consult the boys and the blackbirds." There is a natural affinity between the two, and the boy who does not grow up in natural relationship with birds and trees suffers a loss of privilege which can never be entirely made up. For it is a great deal easier to make the ac-



THE MILL-POND

word or phrase for a walk before breakfast, which may be translated, "eating the morning air."

The boy on the farm sees nature before breakfast, when senses and mind and heart are on the alert, when experience has not brought sophistication with it, and when sensation still keeps its pristine freshness.

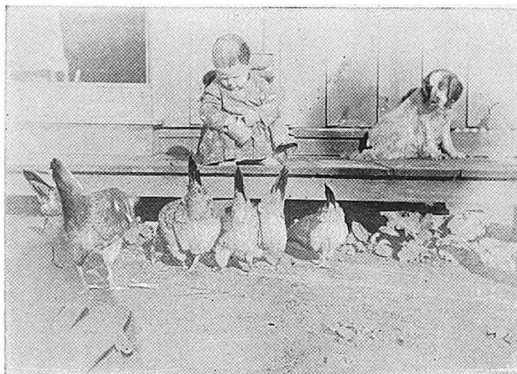
The healthy boy is one of great appetite for sights and sounds, and nothing escapes him. He knows every path



NOON IN THE SHEEP-LOT

through the woods, every pool in the brook, every cavern in the hills, every sequestered hollow where the noise of the world is softened into the silence of rustling leaves and murmuring streams. One of the most erudite of American scholars, whose large learning has not smothered the instincts of his youth, declares that he is never entirely happy until he stands barefooted in the old fields.

Nature's true lovers perceive this, and demand that the companion



FEEDING THE CHICKENS



PICKING DAISIES

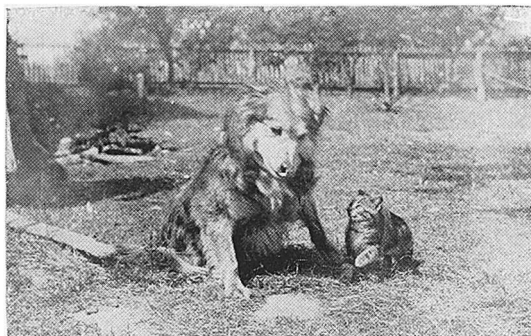
whom he takes into the wilderness with him shall be of the right sort; one who, as Burroughs says, will not "stand between you and that which you seek."

"I want for companion," he continues, "a dog or a boy, or a person who has the virtues of dogs and boys—transparency, good-nature, curiosity, open sense, and a nameless quality that is akin to trees, and growths, and the inarticulate forces of nature. With him you are alone and yet you have company; you are free; you feel no disturbing element; the influences of nature stream through and around him; he is a good conductor of the subtle fluid.

"The quality or qualification I refer to belongs to most persons who

spend their lives in the open air—to soldiers, hunters, fishers, laborers, and to artists and poets of the right sort."

There is something incommunicable in such a fellowship with nature, which dates back to the time when the boy found in her his chosen playmate, and which still keeps up the old game of hide and seek even when his methods have become scientific and the result of his search is a contribution to knowledge.



MAKING FRIENDS



Drawn by Woldemar Friederich

THE WILD HUNTSMAN—II. THE SACRILEGIOUS HUNT

They arrange a deer-hunt on Corpus Christi day. Wulfhild urges Albrecht to show what his falcons can do ; but the deer have fled before the sound of the church-bells. The Count curses the monks and rests for the night in a camp.